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Howard's Presence Felt at PUSH Expo

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Howard's Presence Felt at PUSH EXPO

As early as December 1972, shortly after the violent death of two students at Southern University in Baton Rouge, La., Dr. James E. Cheek, President of Howard University, alerted the public to the threat facing Black colleges. He expressed the fear that "merging or consolidating predominantly Black institutions with predominantly white institutions can easily and quickly result in our Black young people having less higher educational opportunity than is currently available to them."

In September 1973, as one of the 34 predominantly Black colleges and universities to participate in the 1973 PUSH (People United to Save Humanity) Expo at Chicago's International Amphitheatre, Howard University keenly felt the special concern which was expressed in the Expo's theme: "SAVE THE BLACK COLLEGES."

The Rev. Jesse Jackson, president of Operation Push, while concurring with that prevailing theme, noted further: "When Black and white colleges merge, the Black president is inevitably demoted, Black coaches are fired, and only the Black athletes remain to boost crowd attendance."

Under the auspices of the Expo, which was held from September 19 to 23, scores of Black community leaders, attorneys and alumni of predominantly Black institutions, met to discuss the plight and future of Black colleges. With Dr. Cheek serving as a leader, presidents of some of the nation's 112 predominantly Black colleges discussed specific strategies, which include suggestions for Congressional hearings, federal legislations and intensified fund-raising efforts to save Black colleges from further destruction.

The '73 PUSH Expo thus set the stage for an important national campaign. Contacted three months after the Expo, Raytino Epps, staff coordinator for PUSH, said the Expo succeeded in putting "Black colleges on the minds of an awful lot of people."

As part of the campaign to save Black colleges, Dr. Cheek and twelve presidents of Black institutions of higher education met with President Nixon for 90 minutes at the White House on November 29, 1973, to discuss the problems confronting these institutions.

The Black college heads who met with Mr. Nixon represented the National Association for Equal Opportunity in Higher Education, an organization composed of more than 100 predominantly Black institutions enrolling over 200,000 students. In that capacity, they asked the President—among other things—to establish an Ad-

visory Council on Black Colleges and Universities which would serve as a liaison body to the White House.

Of the \$4 billion federal money appropriated annually for higher education, only \$220 million go to Black colleges. The delegation who met with Mr. Nixon asked that more money be allocated to Black colleges. At a press conference following the meeting, Dr. Roy Hudson, president of Hampton Institute in Virginia and a spokesman for the group, addressed himself to that issue. He said the group got from the President "absolute assurance that the figure would increase within the limitations of what was pragmatically possible." In justifying why Black colleges need more money, Dr. Hudson noted that although Black colleges have only 40 per cent Black enrollment, they produce about 80 per cent of the nation's Black graduates annually.

At this time, it is too early to say how much more federal money above the current \$220 million level will be made available by the government. Meanwhile, solutions to the major problems facing Black colleges are being explored on Black campuses.

At Howard, Dr. Cheek proclaimed the week of November 26-30, 1973 as "Save and Change Black Colleges Week at Howard University." In his proclamation, Dr. Cheek pointed out that "the traditionally Black colleges have provided the overwhelming majority of college-trained Black professionals in the country." The Black enrollment in collegiate institutions today under-represents the total Black population, Dr. Cheek noted.

The current push to keep Black colleges Black, and under Black leadership, has a twist of bitter irony. After decades of trying, and partially succeeding in gaining access to white institutions, Blacks, imbued with a new sense of pride, have decided that white schools are not necessarily synonymous with superiority. Now, Blacks are asserting it is important that Black youngsters attend schools that reflect Black values and cultural orientation. As Dr. Cheek put it, merging Black colleges with white colleges for the sole purpose of "integration" is a poor excuse. "America," he noted, "has not yet reached that level of maturity and racial unconsciousness that allows anything to lose its 'racial identity.'"

by Genevieve Ekaete.



A Deeply Touched Mordecai Johnson
During the Ceremony.

A Program for the Future

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professional degree under the jurisdiction of the appropriate professional school.

■ The development of advanced professional degrees in all professional schools where there are critical deficiencies in advanced specialists in critical professional fields.

■ The establishment of a School of General Studies as an experimental academic program offering the general education programs required in the University's undergraduate professional schools and a number of others yet to be developed.

■ The reorganization of the undergraduate arts and sciences programs to accelerate the time required for the completion of degree requirements at the level of the baccalaureate, and the development of totally new programs integrating undergraduate study in the arts and sciences more closely with advanced level study in the graduate school of arts and sciences.

■ The development of a multi-campus university with a revised master plan for more intensive use of the land area of the present campus, the development of a campus on the Beltsville (Maryland) property, and the acquisition of additional land area in the District of Columbia.

During its 105 years of existence, Howard has been a considerable influence and force in the higher education of young Black people from this nation and other countries.

Its requirements for the future and the demands that it will be called upon to meet greatly exceed what has been characteristic of the past.

All of American higher education in the decade of the 1970's and beyond must truly come to grips with the socio-economic-cultural problems created by ethnic divisions growing out of ethnic and cultural diversity in a culturally plural society. While much of the contribution to the solution of these problems must be borne by all of the nation's social institutions, the greatest burden must be borne by institutions of higher learning and among these institutions, the greatest challenge is doubtless faced by the nation's Black institutions of higher learning, and among these institutions, most acutely by Howard.

It is the only such University now capable of achieving true excellence and of rendering both national and international leadership in the area of higher educational opportunity for Black Americans and other minority groups. □

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